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Department of State

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TELEGRAM

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-81 AF-10 ADS-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01  
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15  
TRSE-00 OMB-01 HA-05 /070 W

-----096281 270027Z /75

R 261933Z DEC 79

FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO USICA WASHDC

SECSTATE WASHDC 2567

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL DHARHAN

AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMCONSUL KARACHI

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOGADISHU

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY SANA

USLO RIYADH

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

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WE BELIEVE THIS SITUATION STILL EXISTS BASICALLY AS DESCRIBED, ALTHOUGH SOME OF ITS FEATURES HAVE IN RECENT MONTHS BECOME MORE PROMINENT BECAUSE OF IRAN.

3. AFTER KHOMEINI TAKEOVER, IRANIAN SITUATION ATTRACTED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION FROM EGYPTIAN PUBLIC EVEN THOUGH GOE-GUIDED MEDIA GAVE ONLY MODERATE PLAY TO EVENTS. SADAT'S DOMESTIC OPPONENTS WERE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN IRAN. CONSERVATIVE MUSLIM GROUPS WERE ENCOURAGED BY A GOVERNMENT CLAIMING TO IMPLEMENT ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES, WHILE LEFTISTS, WHO DID NOT PARTICULARLY LIKE KHOMEINI, WERE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT OUSTER AND VILIFICATION OF SHAH AS "ARCHETYPE OF REACTIONARY, CORRUPT, WESTERN-ORIENTED" REGIME. EVEN EGYPTIAN MODERATES WERE INTRIGUED BY KHOMEINI AT FIRST, BUT LATER BEGAN TO BECOME DISILLUSIONED AS HE DISPLAYED HIS HARSH STYLE OF RULE. THEN THE SEIZURE OF HOSTAGES AND PRESIDENT CARTER'S HANDLING OF THE PROBLEM TURNED MORE EGYPTIAN SYMPATHIES AGAINST KHOMEINI AND IN FAVOR OF THE U.S., SO THAT AT THE MOMENT THE CLIMATE IS SUCH THAT EGYPTIANS DO NOT SPEAK OUT DIRECTLY IN SUPPORT OF KHOMEINI. TODAY THE DOMINANT FACTORS IN THIS PUBLIC MOOD ARE: (1) THE AMERICAN HOSTAGES ARE INNOCENT VICTIMS IN A TEST OF WILLS BETWEEN KHOMEINI AND CARTER, (2) CARTER HAS THE POWER TO HARM IRAN BUT FOR HUMANITARIAN REASONS HE IS SHOWING ADMIRABLE RESTRAINT, AND (3) THIS UNFORSEEN CRISIS, PLUS THE UNEXPECTED EVENTS AT THE MOSQUE IN MECCA AND THE ATTACKS OF SEVERAL AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC ESTABLISHMENTS, COMING SIMULTANEOUSLY, HAVE CREATED A CLIMATE OF UNCERTAINTY AND CONCERN ABOUT WHAT MAY HAPPEN NEXT IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

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USICA

FOR NEA CURRAN FROM PAO

E.O. 12065: GDS 12/18/85 (WILLIAM A. RUGH)

SUBJECT: ISLAM AND THE TEHRAN CRISIS: EGYPTIAN PUBLIC REACTION

REF: A) USICA 59954, B) CAIRO FM-1 (2/21/79) NOTAL  
C) SANA 8454, D) USICA 29815

SUMMARY: EGYPTIAN PUBLIC'S SYMPATHY FOR KHOMEINI DIMINISHED DURING 1979 AND IN CURRENT CONFRONTATION WITH U.S. MOST EGYPTIANS SIDE WITH LATTER. NEVERTHELESS IRANIAN AND OTHER EVENTS HAVE HELPED EVOKE SEVERAL LATENT FACTORS IN THE PERCEPTION OF AT LEAST SOME IMPORTANT EGYPTIANS: INTEREST IN ISLAMIC-BASED GOVERNMENT, ANTI-PATHY TOWARDS A CORRUPT RULER CLOSELY TIED TO THE WEST, A FEAR THAT THE WEST IS HOSTILE TO ISLAM, A LINK BETWEEN THAT HOSTILITY AND U.S. SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL, AND BASIC SOLIDARITY WITH LDGS AGAINST ALLEGED SUPERPOWER NEO-IMPERIALISM. ALTHOUGH EGYPTIANS GENERALLY SUPPORT EGYPT'S CLOSE TIES WITH THE U.S., THESE FACTORS ARE PRESENT ALSO AND COULD EMERGE UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES. POST SUBMITS RECOMMENDATIONS ON USICA THEMES.

1. REF A WAS USEFUL ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN OPINION AND SUMMARY OF TALKING POINTS WE CAN EMPLOY HERE. FOLLOWING IS, BRIEFLY, OUR PERSPECTIVE ON THE SITUATION.

2. IN FM-1, POST ANALYZED IN SOME DETAIL DEVELOPMENTS IN EGYPT IN RECENT YEARS WHICH ON THE SURFACE APPEAR TO REFLECT A REVIVAL OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM BUT WHICH IN FACT HAVE A COMPLEX OF SEVERAL CAUSES, NOT ALL DIRECTLY RELATED TO ISLAM, INCLUDING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND A SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS TO DOMESTIC PROBLEMS.

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OF ISLAM AS A WHOLE, EGYPTIANS' FIRST REACTION IS TO BLAME US AND OUR MEDIA (ATTACK THE MESSENGER BECAUSE OF THE MESSAGE) FOR INACCURATE GENERALIZATIONS PUTTING ALL ISLAMIC COUNTRIES INTO SAME CATEGORY. MINISTER OF STATE MANSUR HASSAN TOLD AMSPEC WILLIAM QUANDT AND THE PAO RECENTLY THAT THESE MAGAZINES TOTALLY MISUNDERSTAND ISLAM, AND HE RATHER DEFENSIVELY SAID THAT KHOMEINI'S REVOLUTION WAS NOT ISLAMIC. EGYPTIAN MUSLIMS RESENT BROAD GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT NEGATIVE ISLAMIC CHARACTERISTICS WHICH HAVE BEEN MADE BY AMERICANS DISCUSSING IRAN, OR MECCA, AND ARE FRUSTRATED THAT WE DO NOT HAVE A MORE SOPHISTICATED OR DIFFERENTIATED UNDERSTANDING OF ISLAMIC PRACTICE.

FOURTH, AND POTENTIALLY POWERFUL AS A MOTIVATING IDEA HERE, IS A POSSIBLE LINK BETWEEN RECENT "ISLAMIC" EVENTS IN THE AREA, AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI QUESTION. EGYPTIANS SYMPATHETIC TO MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IDEAS SEE THE WEST, IN COLLUSION WITH ISRAEL AS AN "ANTI-ISLAMIC WESTERN AGENT", WORKING TO OPPOSE ISLAM AND MUSLIM RULE. THIS IS A RECURRENT THEME IN THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE "AL DA'WA". WHEN IRAN ACCUSED THE U.S. OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE MECCA INCIDENT, THE INCLUSION OF ISRAEL AS AN ALLEGED CO-CONSPIRATOR ADDED BOTH CREDIBILITY AND A LARGE MEASURE OF EMOTIONAL CONTENT TO THE CHARGE: FORTUNATELY THE STORY WAS QUICKLY DISCREDITED HERE. BY THE SAME TOKEN, THE PLO'S EFFORT TO MEDIATE BETWEEN IRAN AND THE U.S.

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4. ALTHOUGH THESE FACTORS CURRENTLY DOMINATE, AND REINFORCE EGYPTIAN SYMPATHY FOR THE U.S. AND AGAINST IRAN, SEVERAL OTHER SECONDARY ELEMENTS REMAIN JUST BELOW THE SURFACE. FIRST, EVEN TODAY, KHOMEINI'S IDEAS ARE BY NO MEANS DISCREDITED AMONG ALL EGYPTIAN GROUPS. ONE SENIOR CAIRO UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR HAS JUST PUBLISHED AN ARABIC COLLECTION OF KHOMEINI SPEECHES WITH A SYMPATHETIC FOREWORD, AND STUDENTS AND OTHERS STILL FIND HIS APPEAL RELEVANT TO THEIR SEARCH FOR AUTHENTIC POLITICAL IDENTITY. SECONDLY, THE EGYPTIAN PUBLIC HAS VERY LITTLE SYMPATHY FOR THE SHAH. THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS COMING TO EGYPT EVOKED WIDESPREAD (PRIVATE) CRITICISM, AND ALTHOUGH THIS POSSIBILITY SEEMS NOW TO BE REMOTE, AMERICA'S CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE SHAH, EMPHASIZED EVERY DAY BY IRANIAN PRONOUNCEMENTS, IS A NEGATIVE FACTOR FOR THE U.S. AMONG POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS EGYPTIANS.

THIRDLY, ONE IMPORTANT IDEA THAT HAS SURFACED DURING 1979 IS THAT THE WEST IS SOMEHOW GENERALLY HOSTILE TO ISLAM, AND MUSLIMS. REPORTS OF U.S. GOVERNMENT CRASH EFFORTS TO "DEAL WITH RESURGENT ISLAM" THROUGHOUT THE AREA, PLUS U.S. MEDIA ANALYSES OF MIDEAST DEVELOPMENTS, HAVE HELPED AROUSE LATENT FEARS OF A WESTERN/ISLAMIC CONFLICT. FOLLOWERS OF MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IDEAS EMPHASIZE THIS THEME IN THEIR MONTHLY PUBLICATIONS AND PRESUMABLY IN PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS. AMERICA IN THIS CONCEPT IS SEEN BY SADAT'S CRITICS OF THE LEFT AND RIGHT AS BRINGING AMERICAN CULTURAL IMPERIALISM INTO EGYPT THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR POLICY. BUT EVEN MODERATE AND ESTABLISHMENT EGYPTIANS ARE BEGINNING TO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT THE TREND IN AMERICA'S DISCUSSION OF "RESURGENT ISLAM" THAT THEY READ ABOUT IN TIME AND NEWSWEEK. AWARE THAT KHOMEINI IS HARMING WESTERN IMAGE

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RELIGION; F) SPECIFICALLY IN THE TEHRAN CRISIS, PRESIDENT CARTER'S POLICY HAS THE STRONG SUPPORT NOT ONLY OF THE ENTIRE AMERICAN PEOPLE, BUT ALSO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY (AS IN USICA 59954).

7. THE APPROACHES ALREADY BEING TAKEN BY USICA MEDIA ARE THE RIGHT ONES: WISH TO EMPHASIZE ONLY THE SPECIAL IMPACT WHICH STATEMENTS BY MUSLIM LEADERS IN THE U.S. AND ABROAD CAN HAVE IN THIS CURRENT SITUATION.

8. AGENCY OUGHT TO CONSIDER WHAT MIGHT BE DONE (DIRECTOR'S LETTER OF 9/26/79) TO HELP AMERICANS UNDERSTAND ISLAMIC COUNTRIES BETTER. RUGH

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ATTRACTED CONSIDERABLE EGYPTIAN INTEREST, AND KHOMEINI'S REJECTION OF THE OFFER COST HIM SOME EGYPTIAN SUPPORT. ALSO, LINK TO ARAB-ISRAEL QUESTIONS CAN EASILY BE MADE THROUGH JERUSALEM WHICH HAS GREAT SYMBOLISM FOR MUSLIMS.

FIFTH, IRAN AS A SMALL DEVELOPING COUNTRY IS SEEN AS BASICALLY THE "UNDERDOG" IN A CONFLICT WITH A SUPERPOWER, HAS THE POTENTIAL TO EVOKE SUCH SUPPORT FROM EGYPTIANS, FOR WHOM DOMINATION BY STRONG FOREIGN POWERS IS A CENTRAL ELEMENT IN THEIR HISTORY. IF THE CURRENT SITUATION DID NOT INVOLVE HOSTAGES, THERE WOULD BE MUCH GREATER EGYPTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF IRAN'S EFFORTS TO THUMB ITS NOSE AT UNCLE SAM, DESPITE THE FACT THAT EGYPTIANS GENERALLY APPROVE OF THEIR COUNTRY'S CLOSE COOPERATION WITH AMERICA. IN SHORT, THE EGYPTIAN PUBLIC'S FEELINGS ARE COMPLEX AND CONTAIN MANY DIFFERENT ELEMENTS WHICH CAN EMERGE DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES. ACTS OF VIOLENCE, FOR EXAMPLE, BETWEEN AMERICANS AND MUSLIMS, COULD EVOKE EGYPTIAN EMOTIONS AGAINST U.S.

5. THEMATIC AREAS MOST IMPORTANT FOR USICA TO CONSIDER IN THE CURRENT SITUATION AND NEAR FUTURE ARE THEREFORE AS FOLLOWS: A) AMERICAN GENUINE RESPECT FOR ALL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS; B) AMERICANS SHARE MANY BASIC VALUES WITH MUSLIMS (CAIRO 2953); C) U.S. EFFORTS TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT IN LIVES OF OTHERS ARE WITHOUT REGARD TO RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, BUT INSTEAD ARE BASED ON OTHER COMMON CONCERN; D) AMERICAN RESPECT FOR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS DOES NOT MEAN ALL AMERICANS HAVE DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF ISLAM: IT IS IN THE INTEREST OF MUSLIM PEOPLES TO HELP AMERICANS UNDERSTAND ISLAM BETTER; E) PRESIDENT CARTER'S OWN POLICIES REFLECT GENUINE AMERICAN CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, THE DIGNITY OF MAN, PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES, AND RESPECT FOR

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